The Mountain-Prairie Review

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Bismarck Hosts Director's Waterfowl Hunt

By Dan Sobieck, External Affairs

Although wetland conservation and waterfowl production remain a cornerstone of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and hunting is one of six priority uses of the system, in recent years this legacy has often been overshadowed by endangered species issues.

That focus shifted recently when Service Director Steve Williams hefted a shotgun and traveled afield near Bismarck, N.D., to participate in a waterfowl and upland bird hunt organized by Ron Reynolds, of the Service's Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET) office in Bismarck.

Williams arrived on October 21 and for two days pursued ducks, geese, and pheasants on land owned by longtime Service partners Dr. Tom and Katie Hutchens. After the second day's hunt, Williams also participated in interviews with state media representatives and staff from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department.

"I think one of the important challenges of the next decade is providing enough opportunities for folks to experience hunting," said Williams, who has advocated a balanced, cooperative approach to Service issues. Williams cited Service programs in North Dakota as models of partnership and cooperation.

"With all the Waterfowl Production Areas and National Wildlife Refuges, folks have to work closely with the state," Williams said, adding that non-governmental organizations and private landowners are equally important partners when it comes to species and habitat conservation.

Despite high winds and unseasonably cold temperatures, Williams' efforts during the hunt were rewarded with several birds for his game bag and the spectacle of thousands of geese, ducks, and sand-hill cranes making their annual migration southward.

Photos by Ryan Hagerty.
On left: USFWS Director Steve Williams.
Above: Ron Reynolds, Dr. Tom Hutchens and Steve Williams.

Happy Thanksgiving

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GREENBACK C UTTHROAT TROUT SALVAGE A SUCCESS

By Jeff Peterson, Ecological Service

The summer of 2002 was a hard year for the fish living in the high mountain streams of Colorado. Our extreme drought, combined with the hot, dry weather caused the snow-fed waters to shrink to a fraction of their normal flow and in some cases, to dry up altogether. Even the streams that had sustained the native greenback cutthroat trout through the turbulent ups and downs of past millennia succumbed to the conditions. More and more trout were forced into the shrinking pools of water which became smaller every day.

As is usually the case in nature, bad times for one species means boom times for others. Raccoons, bobcats, hawks, and a plethora of other opportunists weren't about to pass up the chance for an easy meal at the expense of the greenbacks. One by one, the threatened trout were disappearing from their historic brood stream. The larger fish were the first to go. It was harder for them to hide from predators, and they required more water than the smaller fish for their very survival. Things were looking pretty dismal for the greenbacks.

By early August, this was the situation the Colorado Division of Wildlife found on Como Creek - a high elevation, cold, clean, snow-fed stream between the small towns of Nederland and Ward, west of Boulder, Colorado.

The Como Creek greenbacks are considered a keystone historic population because of their genetic purity. Something had to be done to preserve this important population of fish and it had to be done quickly.

Within a week, the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, the City of Boulder, and the University of Colorado organized an emergency salvage of the ill-fated Como Creek greenbacks. So, on a hot August morning, at 9000' in elevation, 27 biologists, ecologists, geneticists, watershed experts, and interns gathered to make the final decision on what was going to be done. In very little time, a unanimous decision was made to move the fish. On the spot, teams were formed, backpack shockers were distributed and five gallon fish-hauling buckets were divvied up. In order to ensure the genetic material in the population would be represented for future generations, we set our goal at removing at least 200 fish.

The fish were electro-shocked, quickly netted and placed in a five gallon bucket containing a gallon or two of creek water to avoid a sudden temperature or chemical change that could further stress the fish. Crew members would then hike the bucket of fish to the 'processing center'.

At the processing center, the fish's adipose fin was clipped for shipment to the University of Colorado lab to be checked for genetic purity. This completed, it was off to the live well, safe from predators, low water and the competition for food that had marked most of the spring and summer for these fish. After five hours, more than 300, three-to-nine inch fish were collected.

Less than a week later, the fish were still doing well and it was time to move them to their refugia in a fishless reservoir in the mountains above Denver.

On a cool day in Colorado's high country, we began the task of releasing the greenbacks - Colorado's state fish - back into the wild. We drove up the gullied road, stopped at the dam, and everybody piled out. The view was breathtaking. Small glaciers were nestled in the craggy rocks releasing their precious cargo of water which tumbled down the cliffs. After a few moments of admiration, it was time to get to work.

With coolers containing five gallons of water and 10-15 fish, the runners began the last leg of the long journey. It didn't take long to figure out that climbing up a steep incline wasn't going to be a cake walk. At the midway point, a crew member checked the condition of the fish, recharged the oxygen in the water and, determined if there was enough water left in the cooler to continue. After this brief but welcome pause, the hike continued through wet meadows buzzing with insect life, under aromatic blue spruce trees, and around rock slides that had splintered the trees under the weight of a thousand boulders.

Once we arrived at our destination, the packs were stripped off and the bungee cords unhooked. It was happily noted that not one fish had perished from what must have been a very rough ride.

We carried the coolers down to the rocky shore and slowly released the fish into the clear cool waters. It didn't take too long before they ventured into deeper water away from the shore and discovered the smorgasbord of insects resting on the surface. Little 'plips' could be heard in the lake as the greenbacks broke the water's surface.

By the time the afternoon thunderstorms started rolling over the peaks it was time to head for home. Although tired, wet and hungry, we all knew the work had been worth it. A whole population of creatures that were practically doomed to die had just been saved. Yes, it was good work.

Media Corner

News Media: What is News?

By Debbie Felker, Colorado River Info & Edu Coordinator

What we think is news may not be to the media. The classic definition taught to all beginning journalism students is, "When a dog bites a man, that's not news, because it happens too often. But if a man bites a dog, that is news." This example states the enduring value of novelty to the news business.

Editor's strive to produce stories with broad appeal. They want stories that are timely, significant, affect a large number of people, provide human interest or impact history. Although interesting and important, routine projects rarely have the type of news appeal the media want. Try to think yourself in the editor's shoes when deciding whether or not your activity or event is "news". Think about the kinds of stories that interest you.

Here are some story ideas that might interest the media:

- Is it a "first?" (ie.: grand openings, species reintroduction)
- Is there human appeal? (Kid's fishing day, local citizen who volunteers with conservation efforts, FWS programs with local schools or other community organizations, "heroes")
- Is it timely? (Annual migration of sandhill cranes, affects of drought, floods, fire, disease or other acts of nature on a refuge's plants, birds, fish and wildlfie)
- Is a "celebrity" involved? (A local elected official, the Secretary of the Interior, a well-known community leader).

Next month: Preparing a News Release

Deadline for 2003 Pocket Guide Updates

The National Outreach Team will begin revising and updating the *Employee Pocket Guide Conserving the Nature of America* for the 2003 edition, and wants to hear from you.

The pocket guide is intended as a tool for every employee, and collects as much useful information as possible in one convenient location to help you to spread the word about America's natural resources and the Service's role in conserving them. The 2003 Employee Pocket Guide will be distributed to every employee in January/February.

Please submit your comments, corrections, tips for improvement , and perhaps more importantly, any changes in field station contact information by November 22 to:

Anita Noguera, National Outreach Coordinator, Phone: (202) 219-1837, Fax: (202) 208-7409 and e-mail: Anita_Noguera@fws.gov.

Do Fast Calculations

By Heather Gonzalez, ITM

Have you ever needed to know the largest value in a series of cells in Microsoft Excel? You can create a formula to do that, but there is a faster way.

To view the largest value in a series of cells:

- Select the cells in which you are interested, and you will see the sum of the range displayed on the status bar, which is the horizontal area below the worksheet window.

- If the status bar is not displayed, click **Status Bar** on the **View** menu.

- Right-click the status bar, and then click **Max.** Now you can see the maximum value displayed on the status bar.

You can use the same technique to find the average of, the sum of, or the minimum value in the selected range. You can also count the cells that contain numbers (by selecting **Count Nums**) or count the number of filled cells (by selecting **Count**).

FAST FACTS

Over 960,000 acres of land have been protected due to the efforts of the Wildlife Habitat Acquisition Offices in Aberdeen and Huron, South Dakota. These acquisitions are made under the authority of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Act of 1934, whose primary purpose is to acquire lands to benefit waterfowl production. Every year the office spends between $5 to $7 million on acquisition, playing a crucial role in the future of wildlife in the region.

View from the RD's Office

By Ralph Morgenweck, RD R6

John Blankenship and I recently returned from field trips in North and South Dakota. This is something we do every fall. While we carried shotguns and were fortunate enough to add a few birds to the larder, the real reason for these trips has always been to reconnect with our field staff and partners and to remind ourselves again just what it is we work for.

It's easy to forget sometimes, to lose sight of the larger picture, especially for those of us in the Regional Office. That's why I make a point of heading out each fall. While these trips are a welcome reprieve from a steady diet of meetings, paperwork and conference calls, there's also an undeniable sense of satisfaction gained by slogging through wetlands in pursuit of waterfowl or wading through waist-high prairie in search of ringnecks.

Nearly as elusive as a rooster pheasant, we're also much more likely to encounter positive feedback in the field. It's clear that good and great things happen where our collective efforts are ultimately applied to resource projects on the ground.

The bottom line: regardless of what we do for the Service, regardless of our roles, in the end we all contribute in some way to better habitat, a cleaner environment, and healthier animal populations. It doesn't matter if you process paperwork all day, clean fish raceways, sample contaminants or, like me, spend most of your time in meetings – each of us is making a contribution and it does make a difference. I'm already looking forward to next fall.

Congressional Affairs

By Matt Kales, External Affairs

On Saturday, November 2, U.S. Representative Scott McInnis of Colorado's Third Congressional District, visited Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge in southern Colorado to pay tribute to the refuge and its fifty-year legacy of conservation. At an afternoon ceremony marked by blustery autumn weather, Mr. McInnis presented Project Leader Mike Blenden with a written statement recognizing both the refuge's outstanding contributions to waterfowl conservation and the high-quality recreation opportunities the refuge offers to the community in the San Luis Valley. The text of this statement will be entered into the Congressional Record as a simple resolution when Congress returns for the lame-duck session in mid-November.

Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Alamosa/ Monte Vista Refuge Complex, is one of the most productive duck nesting areas in North America, and is the site of the continent's longest-running duck density study. Additionally, Monte Vista provides important habitat for Greater Sandhill cranes and endangered Whooping cranes. Consisting of more than 11,000 acres situated amidst a working agricultural landscape, the refuge is one of the six Service stations in Mr. McInnis' district, a sprawling area that covers nearly half of Colorado and is home to many of that state's most significant natural resources.

Native American Affairs

By David Redhorse, External Affairs

President Bush proclaimed November 2002 as National American Indian Heritage Month. He encouraged all Americans to commemorate this month with appropriate programs and activities. The American Indian Program Council, representing Denver area federal offices, highlights Native America 2002, with an American Indian Heritage Training, November 19. Several people from the Regional Office will meet and hear about current Native American affairs from Tex G. Hall, Chairman, Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, and President of the National Congress of American Indians. They will also learn about Indian trust responsibilities from Raymond Cross, Professor, University of Montana School of Law. Several practitioners on Indian education and resource management will also share their knowledge.

American Indian tribes are engaged in various partnership activities. Some are noted below:

- The Ute Tribe constructed an Elders Pond, with technical advice from the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program. To protect endangered fish the Tribe constructed a fish screen into the Pond's outlet.
- The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe's Prairie Management Program released a third set of black-footed ferrets on their lands.
- The Blackfeet Nation and Salish and Kootenai Tribes continue to manage grizzly bears.
- The Salish and Kootenai Tribes are restoring riparian habitat for Bull Trout and other fish.
- The Santee Sioux Tribe received three surplus bison bulls from Neal Smith NWR.
- Great Plains tribes continue to anticipate listing of black-tailed prairie dogs under the endangered species act.

The Mountain-Prairie Review is a monthly publication produced by the USFWS Region 6 External Affairs Office. Publisher: Ralph Morgenweck, Regional Director; Editor: Dan Sobieck, ARD-EA; Staff Writers: Karen Miranda Gleason, Matt Kales, Diane Katzenberger, David Redhorse, Sharon Rose ; Design and Layout: Heather Gonzalez, IRM/ Jean Clemens, EA. All contributions from Region 6 employees are welcomed and will be considered for publication.